

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS

Every paper must argue an idea and every paper must clearly state that idea in a thesis statement.

A thesis statement is different from a **topic statement**. A topic statement merely states what the paper is about. A thesis statement states the argument of that paper.

What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement should meet the following criteria:

- Be composed of a sentence or two towards the beginning of your paper (most likely in the first paragraph).
- Mention the main topic of your paper.
- Explain what the rest of your paper will be about.
- Contains an opinion (usually).

EXAMPLES

Topic statements:

- This paper will discuss Harry Truman's decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima.
- The purpose of this paper is to delve into the mindset behind Truman's decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima.
- This paper will explore how Harry Truman came to the decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima.

Thesis statements:

- Harry Truman's decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima was motivated by racism.
- The US confrontation with the Soviets was the key factor in Truman's decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima.
- This paper will demonstrate that in his decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima, Truman was unduly influenced by hawks in his cabinet.

MORE EXAMPLES

The Bad

The War of 1812 came before the Civil War. (bad example)

This is not a good thesis statement because it is obvious and does not need to be proven. Anyone can look at a timeline and figure out that the War of 1812 came before the Civil War.

The Good

This alternative version may not be historically correct, but it could definitely make a strong thesis statement if it were properly supported:

The War of 1812 set into motion the main events that caused the Civil War. (good example)

This example would be a strong thesis statement, because it is not obvious at first glance that the War of 1812 necessarily led to the Civil War at all. Therefore, it contains an opinion.

Too General The Bad

Take a look at this thesis statement:

People need to stay healthy for several important reasons. (bad example)

Could you write a paper on this? You could, but you'd barely be able to scrape the surface.

The Good

Now take a look at a better example, which is much more specific.

Students must get sufficient sleep at night in order to succeed in school. (good example)

****If a reader can say "how?" or "why?" or "so what?" after reading your thesis, you need to alter your thesis so that it answers those questions.**

- Shakespeare's plays are great.
- *Why are they great? What plays are great?*
- Shakespeare's *Midsummer's Night Dream* is his greatest play because it is so complicated.
- *This is better, but how is it complicated? Why does that make it so great?*
- The success of the last scene in *Midsummer Night's Dream* comes from subtle theatrical references to Elizabeth's position as queen.
- *This is good because it gives specific details as to how the play is complicated, and why this is such a success.*